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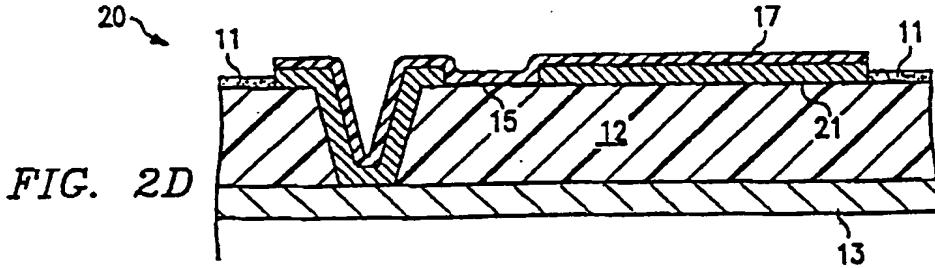
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(54) Method of clean up of a patterned metal layer.

(57) A method of fabricating deformable mirror devices, or any other device, in which a metal pattern is to be etched over a photoresist layer. The method includes removal of a contaminating layer (11) that occurs as a result of the metal etch. This removal is accomplished at the wafer level, with an anhydrous hydrofluoric etch followed by a wet rinse.



TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to fabrication of integrated circuits, and more particularly to an improved method of fabricating a patterned metal layer over a spacer layer, and subsequently etching away the spacer layer.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

DMDs are a type of spatial light modulator, characterized by array of micro-mechanical pixel elements having reflective surfaces. The pixel elements are electronically addressable, such that each can be selectively positioned to direct light in either an "on" or "off" position. An addressed array of pixel elements represents an image frame, with the image being formed as a result of which pixel elements direct light to an image plane. The image can be captured by means of optoelectrical devices and used to generate a display or printed copy.

Typically, the pixel elements of a DMD have associated memory cells for storing the binary signal that will drive the pixel element to its on or off position. An advantage of many DMD designs is that the pixel array, as well as the memory cells and addressing circuits can be fabricated with integrated circuit techniques.

In general, DMD pixel architectures may be distinguished by type of deformation modes, namely torsion beam or cantilever beam. Torsion beam pixels consist of a thick reflective beam suspended over an air gap and connected between two supports by two thin torsion hinges that are under tension. When an address electrode, underlying one half of the torsion beam, is energized, the torsion hinges are twisted and the beam rotates about the axis of the hinges. Cantilever beam pixels consist of a thick reflective beam suspended over an air gap, connected by a thin cantilever hinge to a support. When an underlying address electrode is energized, the cantilever hinge bends and the beam tip is deflected toward the address electrode.

Fabrication of both torsion beam and cantilever beam pixels is typically on top of an address circuit already fabricated on a semiconductor wafer. Once the address circuit is formed, a planarizing spacer layer is placed on the wafer. This spacer layer provides a smooth surface on which to form the hinges and beams. A metal layer is then patterned in the desired shape of the hinges and beams. Finally, the spacer layer is removed from under the beams by an isotropic plasma etch to form the air gap between the beams and address electrodes.

In many fabrication processes, it is desirable to perform the metal patterning at the wafer level. Then, a protective coating is placed over the entire wafer, the wafer is sawed into chips, and the protective coating is removed. Then, the plasma etch is performed to remove the spacer, such that undercutting of the metal pattern occurs to form air gaps. Thus, the spacer removal is at the chip level.

A problem with existing fabrication processes is that the patterning of the metal layer results in a contaminating layer on top of the spacer. This contaminating layer is a mixture of materials that is not easily etched.

Figure 1 illustrates a chip 10 having this contaminating layer 11 over the spacer layer 12. Chip 10 is one of many chips whose various layers have been fabricated in wafer form, with the wafer then being sawed into the chips. Before sawing, a protective coating 18 was deposited over the entire wafer. Figure 1 also shows the address circuitry 13, mirror beam 14, hinge 15, support post 16 formed in prior fabrication steps, as well as an oxide layer 17 used for metal patterning, which has not yet been removed. When the time comes for removal of the spacer layer 12, the contaminating layer 11 interferes with this removal. Incomplete removal results in "webbing" between the mirror beams 14 and limits their performance.

Previous efforts to remove the contaminating layer 11 have been performed "as needed". Thus, because spacer layer 12 is not removed until after the wafer is cut into chips, removal of the contaminating layer 11 is also performed at the chip level. However, this is unnecessarily time consuming. A need exists for a fabrication method that avoids the need for a chip level cleanup of contaminants left by metal patterning.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One aspect of the invention is a method for patterning metal from a metal layer deposited over a photoresist layer of a semiconductor wafer. The relevant steps begin with depositing a metal layer over a photoresist layer on the semiconductor wafer. Portions of the metal layer are etched away to form a desired metal pattern. Byproducts of the metal etching step are removed with an anhydrous hydrofluoric vapor etch of the surface of said wafer. This vapor etch is performed in an etching chamber and is the result of a

reaction of water vapor and hydrofluoric acid gas. The vapor etch is followed by a rinse of the surface of the wafer with water.

A technical advantage of the invention is that the contaminants resulting from metal etching are removed in one step at the wafer level, rather than on a chip-by-chip basis. No pre-undercut clean-up is needed at the chip level. Complete undercutting of a spacer layer under a metal pattern may be accomplished without affecting the metal pattern.

When the method of the invention is used to make specific devices, such as DMDs, the manufacturing process is shortened and the operation of the devices themselves is improved.

10 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 illustrates a semiconductor chip having a contaminating layer over a spacer layer, resulting from an etch of a metal layer.

Figures 2A - 2F illustrate a process of fabricating a metal pattern on a wafer that eliminates the 15 contaminating layer of Figure 1 at the wafer level.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Figures 2A - 2F illustrate a process of fabricating a metal pattern on a wafer 20, which eliminates 20 contaminating layer 11 at the wafer level. Wafer 20 will eventually be cut into chips to make DMDs. Only a cross-sectional view of a single pixel element is shown. An actual wafer 20 would have thousands of such pixel elements.

The various layer-by-layer process steps relevant to patterning a metal layer 21 over a spacer layer 12 are shown. DMDs are an example of an integrated circuit device fabricated by patterning a metal pattern 25 over a spacer layer, with the latter being subsequently removed to form air gaps under the metal elements.

The method of the invention would be useful for any other type of product, made in wafer form with integrated circuit fabrication techniques, in which a metal layer is to be patterned. However, the invention is especially useful for products, such as DMDs, where the contaminating layer 11 interferes with subsequent process steps. In the case of DMDs, contaminating layer 11 interferes with undercutting of a spacer layer 30 11 under a metal pattern.

In Figure 2A, a spacer layer 12 has been placed over the address circuit 13 of the wafer 20. In the example of this description, spacer layer 12 is made from photoresist material, but could be any etchable substance. Spacer layer 12 has been etched to create vias, over which a metal layer 21 is conformally deposited everywhere. Then, an oxide layer 22 is conformally deposited everywhere over metal layer 21. 35 As explained below, metal layer 21 will become beam 14 and support post 16. Oxide layer 17 is for etching purposes and will eventually be removed. It is assumed that previous patterning steps have already formed hinge 15.

The DMD illustrated in Figure 2A is a cantilever beam DMD with a support post 16. The process described herein could be applied to other types of DMDs, such as those that only partially undercut spacer 40 layer 12 to leave portions of spacer layer 12 as support posts.

In Figure 2B, a photoresist layer has been deposited and patterned over oxide layer 22 to form a photoresist mask 24. This mask 24 will protect oxide layer 22 from being etched away during the next step, which is an etching step. Mask 24 corresponds to areas in which it is desired for metal layer 21 to remain after etching, resulting in beams 14. Photoresist mask 24 is formed by using conventional photoresist 45 patterning and exposure techniques.

Figure 2C illustrates a beam oxide mask 17, which corresponds to areas in which beams 14 will be formed. The beam oxide mask 17 is what remains after those areas of oxide layer 22 not protected by photoresist mask 24 have been etched away. After this oxide etch, photoresist mask 24 is removed using conventional techniques.

50 Figure 2D illustrates wafer 20 after etching of metal layer 21 to form beam 14. Oxide mask 17 protects those areas of metal layer 21 that are not to be etched away. The etch is a plasma etch, and removes unprotected portions of metal layer 21 down to the surface of spacer layer 12. As a result of the metal etch, a contaminating layer 11 remains on the surface of photoresist layer 12.

Figure 2E illustrates the removal of contaminating layer 11 by means of a hydrofluoric (HF) acid vapor 55 clean-up in accordance with the invention. Essentially, the clean-up process combines a dry anhydrous HF etch with a wet rinse. In a two-phase clean-up process, contaminating layer 11 is removed by the HF etching, which results in water soluble by-products that are removed during the wet rinse.

The process for removing contaminating layer 11 is performed while wafer 20 is placed in a chamber. The basic steps of the clean-up process are:

- 0) Introducing a high purge nitrogen into the chamber to remove atmospheric gases and to reduce the background water levels
- 5 1) Reducing the nitrogen flow to a selected flow rate, such that it serves as a carrier gas for the reactants. The pressure may be stabilized at a slight positive pressure to promote uniform gas distribution.
- 2) Adding water-laden nitrogen at a predetermined flow rate to allow a thin layer of water to condense on the surface of wafer 20. This is essentially a water-vapor "pretreatment".
- 10 3) Adding anhydrous HF at a predetermined flow rate. The nitrogen flow rates for the carrier gas and the water vapor are also adjusted to a predetermined level. This results in etching of the surface of wafer 20, using nitrogen, water vapor, and HF gas constituents. The result is an HF vapor, which etches the surface of wafer 20. The etch is continued for a predetermined period of time. During this etch, contaminating layer 11 is removed.
- 15 4) Rinsing with a high flow nitrogen purge to remove the etch reactants.
- 5) Rinsing with deionized rinse water to remove etch byproducts.
- 6) Discontinue water rinse and allowing water on wafer 20 to be removed before ramping up to dry spin speed.
- 7) Spin drying the wafer with nitrogen to prevent oxide regrowth.
- 20 20) The temperature and pressure conditions for the above steps are ambient, except as noted.

The above clean-up processing may be performed with commercially available vapor phase etching equipment. An example of such equipment is the Excalibur equipment, manufactured by FSI International. That equipment and its operation are described in U.S. Patent No. 4,749,440, entitled "Gaseous Process and Apparatus for Removing Films from Substrates", incorporated by reference herein. In a vapor phase etcher, wafers are etched in a sealed etch chamber and then transported to a rinse chamber.

A specific example of a vapor clean/wet rinse "recipe", which could be used with the Excalibur equipment is set out in the table below. The step numbers of the table correspond to the numbers of the steps discussed above. Reactants are measured in liters per minute (1pm) and cubic centimeters per minute (ccm). The wafer 20 is rotated on a platform within the chamber at speeds measured in revolutions per minute (rpm).

Step #	Time (Sec)	N ₂ A (1pm)	Vapor (1pm)	HF (sccm)	N ₂ B (1pm)	H ₂ O (0/1)	V (rpm)
35 0	5	30.0			1.0	0	20
1	5	12.0			1.0	0	20
2	10	12.0	2.0		1.0	0	20
35 3	10	16.0	10.0	180	1.0	0	20
40 4	15	22.0	2.0		1.0	0	20
5	10	6.0			1.0	1	1000
6	1	6.0			1.0	0	1000
45 7	15	30.0			1.0	0	3000

In the above table, the entries under N₂A are the primary nitrogen flow. The entries under N₂B are a low range "backside" flow, specific to the type of vapor phase equipment.

An advantage of the vapor clean-up is that it is selective, i.e., it removes only contaminating layer 11 without attacking beam 14 or spacer layer 12. Spacer layer 12 remains intact during the sawing phases until it is desired to be removed at the chip level.

Figure 2F illustrates wafer 20, after contaminating layer 11 has been removed. The next steps will be application of a protective coating and sawing into chips. As compared to Figure 1, as a result of the process described herein, contaminating layer 11 of prior art methods will not be present at the chip level.

55 An experimental test has indicated that, for a particular wafer sample, contaminating layer 11 includes an oxygen concentration of 12.9% in the form of silicon dioxide, organic material, a fluoro-polymer (H₄C₅O₃F₆), and aluminum oxide. The concentrations of aluminum oxide and silicon dioxide were 6.1% and 1.6%, respectively. This analysis of the nature of the contaminants in layer 11 suggests the specific cause

of the "webbing" during removal of spacer layer 12. After the vapor clean-up, the concentration of these oxygen-bearing elements was reduced to 8.1%. Concentrations of silicon dioxide and aluminum oxide were reduced to nominal amounts.

5 Other Embodiments

Although the invention has been described with reference to specific embodiments, this description is not meant to be construed in a limiting sense. Various modifications of the disclosed embodiments, as well as alternative embodiments, will be apparent to persons skilled in the art. It is, therefore, contemplated that 10 the appended claims will cover all modifications that fall within the true scope of the invention.

Claims

1. A method for patterning metal from a metal layer deposited over a photoresist layer of a semiconductor wafer, comprising the steps of:
 - 15 depositing a metal layer over a photoresist layer on the semiconductor wafer;
 - metal etching away Portions of said metal layer to form a desired metal pattern;
 - removing byproducts of said etching step with an anhydrous hydrofluoric vapor etch of the surface of said wafer; and
 - 20 rinsing the surface of said wafer with a liquid.
2. The method of Claim 1, wherein said metal etching step is performed by depositing an oxide layer over said metal layer, depositing a photoresist layer over said oxide layer, patterning said photoresist layer to form a photoresist pattern corresponding to said desired metal pattern, removing portions of said 25 oxide layer not covered by said photoresist pattern to form an oxide pattern corresponding to said desired metal pattern, and etching away portions of said metal layer not covered by said oxide pattern
3. The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of removing byproducts is performed by using water vapor and hydrofluoric acid gas.
- 30 4. The method of Claim 3, wherein said water vapor and hydrofluoric acid gas are carried by a nitrogen carrier.
5. The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of removing byproducts is immediately preceded by a water vapor pretreatment.
- 35 6. The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of removing byproducts is immediately preceded by a high flow purge of nitrogen.
7. The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of removing byproducts is immediately followed with a high 40 flow purge of nitrogen.
8. The method of Claim 1, wherein said rinsing step is performed with water.
- 45 9. The method of Claim 1, further comprising a spin dry step after said rinsing step.
10. A wafer for subsequent cutting into chip form, having a metal pattern spaced over a substrate, comprising:
 - 15 a metal layer patterned over a spacer layer, wherein said metal layer is patterned by means of an etching process; and
 - 50 a spacer layer underlying said metal layer, whose surface is exposed in areas not covered by said metal layer, wherein the exposed areas of said surface are cleaned of contaminants by etching them with a hydrofluoric vapor etch and then rinsing them with a wet rinse.
- 55 11. The wafer of Claim 10, wherein said spacer layer is etched with a vapor etch resulting from a flow of water vapor and hydrofluoric acid gas.

12. A wafer for cutting into deformable mirror device chips, having a pattern of mirror elements spaced over a substrate, comprising:

a metal layer patterned into mirror elements by means of an etching process; and

5 a spacer layer underlying said metal layer, whose surface is exposed in areas not covered by said metal layer, wherein the exposed areas of said surface have been cleaned of contaminants by etching them with a hydrofluoric vapor etch and then rinsing them with a wet rinse.

13. The wafer of Claim 12, wherein said spacer layer is etched with a vapor etch resulting from a flow of water vapor and hydrofluoric acid gas.

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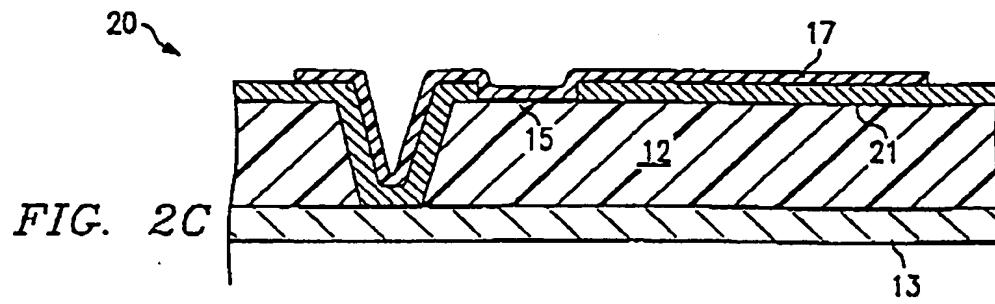
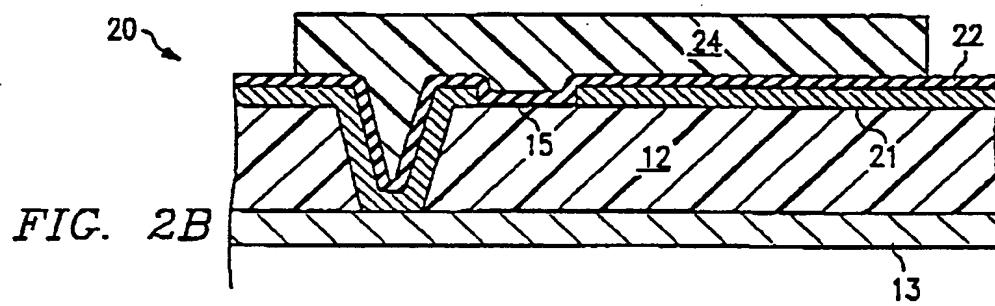
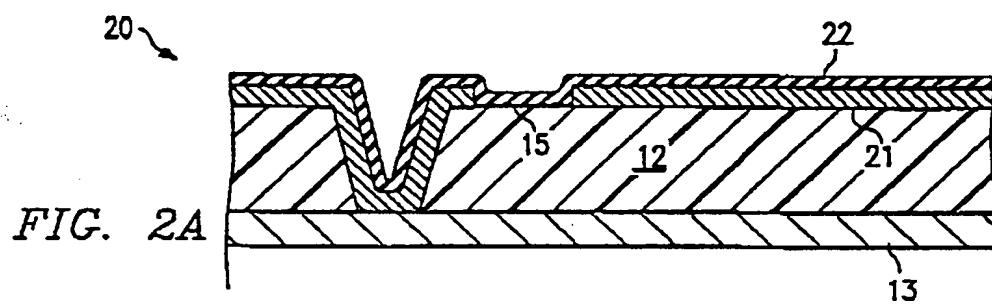
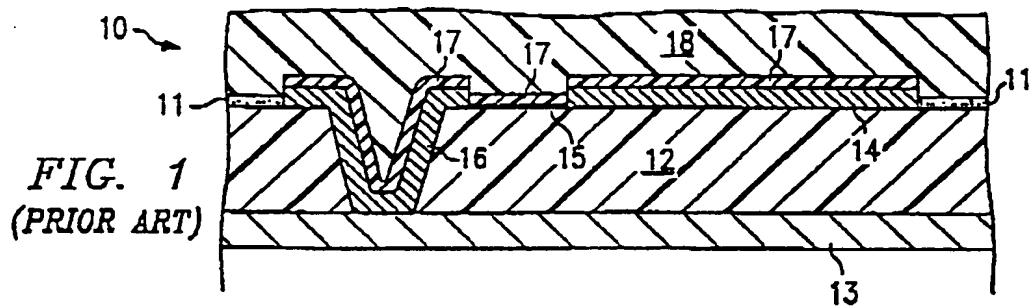
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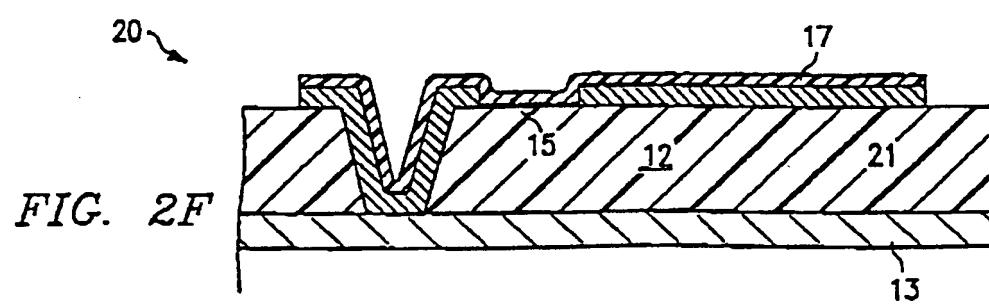
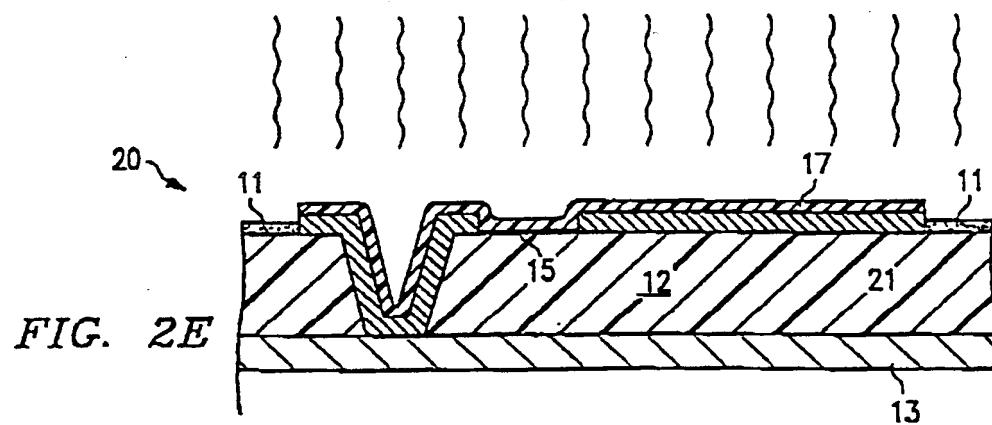
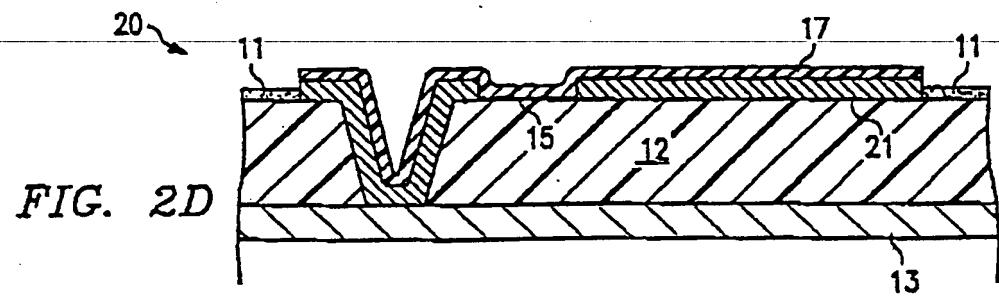
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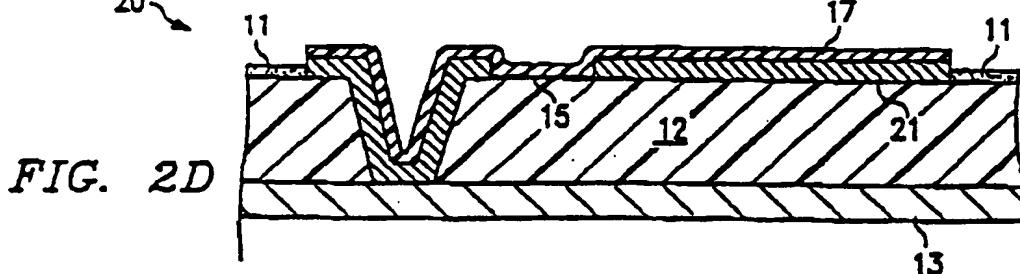
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 93 12 0289

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.CLS)
D,A	US-A-4 749 440 (BLACKWOOD ROBERT S ET AL) 7 June 1988 * the whole document * ---	1-13	G02B26/08 G09F9/37 H01L21/321 H01L21/306
A	US-A-4 710 732 (HORNBECK LARRY J) 1 December 1987 * the whole document * ---	1,10,12	
A	US-A-5 167 761 (WESTENDORP JOHANNES F M ET AL) 1 December 1992 * the whole document * ---	1,3-5, 8-13	
A	EP-A-0 344 764 (WACKER CHEMTRONIC) 6 December 1989 * the whole document * ---	1-13	
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A	US-A-4 445 966 (CARLSON ROBERT J ET AL) 1 May 1984 * the whole document * ---	1,10,12	G02B H01L
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A	JOURNAL OF THE ELECTROCHEMICAL SOCIETY, vol. 139, no. 6, 1 June 1992, pages 1751-1756, XP000324426 ANTTILA O J ET AL: "METAL CONTAMINATION REMOVAL ON SILICON WAFERS USING DILUTE ACIDIC SOLUTIONS" -----	1,10,12	
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	
THE HAGUE	28 November 1996	Brock, T	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	
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